

2020 CAE NEW GRADS CELEBRATION - VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

I am honoured and humbled to be given the opportunity to speak on behalf of my fellow graduates; the 2020 cohort of Canada's Certified Association Executives.

Everyone's path to this moment is different. Some charged head-first at this challenge, taking multiple courses at a time and powering through with impressive speed and vigour. To you I salute your enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge. Others plodded a little more carefully and methodically, taking years to reach this goal. To you, I salute your perseverance and fortitude. Regardless of the path you chose, you have found your way to the summit. I hope you can take a moment to enjoy the view and celebrate the accomplishment. Well done all.

My path was closer to the latter than the former. I began my journey over three years ago, urged on by my boss, Christine Nielsen. Without her not-so-subtle nudges, and tremendous support, I would not be celebrating with you today.

I'm sure my fellow graduates would join me in extending my sincerest thanks to the CAE instructors and program administrators. Their support, guidance and feedback was an instrumental part of the learning experience. And the occasional assignment extension was certainly appreciated.

What struck me most during my journey was the support of this community. Every time I reached out to my network, to participate in yet another benchmarking survey, I was always so pleasantly surprised by the positivity, encouragement and willingness to help I was met by. It reassured me that I was in the right place. That this is a community I want to be part of. A community I am proud to stand with. You CAEs – your good people.

I'm grateful to CSAE for finding a way for us to come together and mark this occasion. This is not the graduation experience I was expecting when I sat my exam earlier this year. This is not the year I was expecting. To borrow a line from CNN's Jake Tapper, I think you aptly describe 2020 as a "hot mess, inside a dumpster fire, inside a train wreck". Our business members are hurting. The hospitality and tourism industries are bearing the full financial impact of this pandemic. Our executive members are hurting. Associations are faced with unprecedented challenges and some will need to find creative solutions in order to simply survive. But we are not retreating.

Leading when things are going good, well, that's easy. It's in the times that are hard, that real leadership shows itself. Times, my friends, are indeed hard. But we are here.

If you've read Brene Brown, you are probably familiar with the Theodore Roosevelt quote, often known as "The Man in the Arena". He delivered the speech in 1910, a year after leaving office, and if we can forgive the gender specificity of the language, I think it's relevant to us now. He said:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he

fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

I wish I could be in the same room as all of you today. To see all those faces marred by dust and sweat and blood. We, all, are the man in the arena. We may be faced with seemingly overwhelming obstacles. In the months ahead we will all strive and err; dust ourselves off again and strive some more. And together, we will see each other through this. Conferences will come back. We will meet again. Along the way, we'll invent whole new ways to engage and serve our members. Because that's what we do. And I'm proud to stand alone side you all.

To my fellow graduates, it's time to take the lesson's we've learned and apply them to challenges we never thought we'd face. It won't be easy. But if it were, anyone could do it. So let's get out there. Let us channel our great enthusiasm and great devotions to these worthy causes. Whether in success or failure, may we always dare greatly.

Thank you.

Michael Grant